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SUBJECT: JORDAN: NEW CABINET PUTS A FRESH FACE ON THE WALL

REF: A. 09 AMMAN 2678

[I](#)B. 09 AMMAN 1896

[I](#)C. 09 AMMAN 1507

Classified By: Ambassador R. Stephen Beecroft
for reasons 1.4 (b) and (d)

[¶](#)1. (S//NF) SUMMARY: The government of newly appointed Prime Minister Samir Rifai has issued a series of circulars -- policy notices for government offices -- aimed at illustrating a break from the policies of the previous government (ref a). One issued on January 4 mandates that government offices display photographs of Crown Prince Hussein (ref c) next to King Abdullah II, leaving some wondering if they should remove traditionally displayed photos of the beloved late King Hussein. Two anti-corruption policies were also issued, a first step in implementing reforms called for by the King in his designation letter of December 9 (ref b).

[¶](#)2. (S//NF) New photos of the Crown Prince, though symbolic, could potentially spark criticism among East Bank Jordanians that power is subtly shifting towards Jordanians of Palestinian origin. The anti-corruption moves are welcomed, but many doubt they will be effective in reigning in an entrenched problem viewed with increasing domestic impatience. END SUMMARY.

A New Face on the Wall

[¶](#)3. (S//NF) A government circular issued on January 4 by Prime Minister Rifai's government directs all public offices to prominently display photos of Crown Prince Hussein bin Abdullah II alongside King Abdullah II. Traditionally, photos of the King and his father, the late King Hussein bin Talal have been displayed. The circular does not say if the Crown Prince's photo should be added to the mix, or if as some wonder, the late King Hussein's photo should be taken down to make way for the Crown Prince.

[¶](#)4. (S//NF) Either way, the decision could prove to be a controversial one. The late King was extremely popular and remains much loved throughout Jordan nearly eleven years after his death. He was particularly well respected among tribal leaders outside Amman for his careful outreach, attention to rural development, and ability to resolve tribal disputes through personal intervention -- all areas where the current King is perceived as weak or uninterested.

[¶](#)5. (S//NF) By contrast, East Bank Jordanians, who are overrepresented in Jordan's bureaucracy, have been skeptical over the appointment of Crown Prince Hussein for his youth (he is fifteen) and his Palestinian lineage. The Crown Prince's mother, Queen Rania, is Palestinian. His father, King Abdullah II, is himself one-half British. This leaves the Crown Prince viewed as only one-quarter Hashemite in some

circles.

First Step towards Anti-Corruption Reform

¶6. (U) The new government also issued two anti-corruption policies. A circular announced on January 4 instructs government officials not to accept gifts valued over 50 Jordanian Dinar (approximately 70 USD). During the week of December 27, the government circulated (but did not formally announce) a new media policy that precludes public officials from employing journalists or paying for positive coverage. In addition, following a visit by Prime Minister Rifai on January 2, Jordan's Anti-Corruption Commission (ACC) and Audit Ombudsman Bureau announced a committee to streamline corruption detection and investigation and to encourage whistle-blowing.

¶7. (C) The policies are a clear effort by the new government to distance itself from the previous one which was undermined by corruption. However, many in Jordan say that corruption has been rampant throughout successive governments, doubt the new one will be any different, and believe these policies are a paltry response.

¶8. (C) In fact, Jordanians have become so cynical on the subject that they find acts of whistle-blowing laughable. For example, Jordanian media reported on December 24 that a civil servant in the Justice Ministry was offered a 200 Dinar reward by the Minister for turning over a 50,000 Dinar bribe offered by a private company seeking favors. The civil servant -- and the Minister's overture -- were lampooned in

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on-line commentaries, including by the employee's co-workers, saying he would have done better to keep the 50,000.

Beecroft